

CHESS - The Musical

original music and plot by B. Andersson, B. Ulvaeus, T. Rice

alternative plotline by Reinhold Brückner (*1963, Konstanz) rbr2018@gmx.com

Remarks

- Florence is not Hungarian anymore but straight American
- I changed the location of Merano to Verona (city of Romeo and Juliet) to avoid thorny political issues with South Tyrole and anti-german polemics.
- the production should be as luminous, colorful and sunny as possible. It's the story that's gloomy, not the world around.
- the score should be instrumented to be entirely acoustic; no electric instruments anymore.
- singers have to be opera-grade and able to perform without microphone in an opera-style acoustic environment.
- CHESS should ultimately be performed as a straight opera and become the worthy successor of Puchini's "Madame Butterfly"

Cast

Freddy Trumper	chess champion
Florence Ursula Anders	Freddy's companion
Anatoly Sergeievsky	chess challenger
Alexii Novikov	Anatoly's assistant
Vladimir Molokov	KGB operative
Walter de Courcey	CIA operative
John	Walter's assistant
Henry Stimson	US official
The Arbiter	the arbiter

Act 1 Hopes and Ambitions

Scene 1

Rockmusic is playing,

Anatoly Sergeievsky and Aleksii Novikov, his assistant, appear on stage

Aleksii: For this fight, I'm on your side

But once the Yankee out of sight

I'll kick your ass and I'll do it right

Anatoly: You and the Yankee will soon see

that I'm no easy treat

If you are the new Challenger

you're heading for defeat

Anatoly and Aleksii are best friends and duel jokingly.

Aleksii: we'll soon see

and here comes our friend from the KGB

(Molokov) (Aleksii off)

Scene 2

Anatoly and Molokov

M: Are you ready for the fight?

A: Couldn't be more

M: You've got the brightest minds of chess behind you

A: Once at the board, you're by yourself

M: Victory loves preparation. You have all their secret analysis at your disposal.

A: I'm up to the one who bested them all single-handedly, all by himself.

M: Well, not entirely by himself.

A: What do you mean? Is there a chess genius in the West, that I have missed?

M: His assistant, Florence Hiller.

A: Isn't she just his lover?

M: We don't know. But do you know how they met?

A: How could I, beats me.

M: At a Blitz tournament where she defeated Trumper, repeatedly.

A: You don't say.

M: We dug a little and found out that she learned Russian within a fortnight.

And speaks it quite fluently.

A: Wow. What is she wasting her time then with that Trumper business?

Can't she find better? In Russia she would be in a top position quickly.

M: You know, in the States, Money reigns supreme.

If you've got none and no connections, you have the choice between cheerleader and hooker.

Depending on your looks.

A: Is she good-looking?

M: You want to meet her? We can arrange that.

A: Would be a change from Aleksii

M: Yes. You didn't bring Svetlana along?

A: Some distance is sometimes better.

M: Of course. While I'm thinking of employment. She might be tempted by an international job with us once that chess business is through.

A: That's your job.

Scene 3

John and Walter

A dark part of the scene lights up. Two men with headphones appear. They are CIA, eavesdropping on the Russians. Global TV is a CIA front and Walter is the executive and, actually, Freddy's handler.

John: You hear that, Chief?

Walter: I do, and I don't like it.

John: What, the girl working for the Russians?

Walter: Right

John: Chess is not Defense. All she can do is give them a few moves.

Walter: Nonsense. If she works on any case she remains american, rich or poor.

The Russians will learn as much from her as about us.

And I prefer it to be the other way round.

We have to react immediately. I'll take care of it myself.

John: Did you know about that Blitz thing and her russian speaking?

Walter: Of course.

We know everything they do
and more

John: Even if they go to the L..

Walter: Local grocery store.

John: If she's so gifted and we know it, why haven't we employed her on something else.

Walter: She's got a job for now, assisting Trumper.

John: When Trumper is through with that chess business, you have a job for him in store, as well?

Walter: You're smart

but you should not ask

too many questions

if you wanna last.

Lights off

Scene 4

Freddy and Florence

Florence (sitting at a chess board): I found some interesting stuff on that position

Freddy: you wrote it down?

Fl: of course

Freddy looks at it; then sings with a scottish accent

Fr: It's a Gambit

I have to give a piece away

I don't know if I like it

My scottish ancestors will turn in their grave(s)

Newspaper sequence

*Duet(?): Florence and Freddy ("If **Mr Nice Guy** beats the bump", with scottish accent by Freddy)*

Freddie's reaction: waltz rythm, always with scottish accent

Anything's better than nothing at all

Sometimes you're moving

Sometimes you stall

Today they elate you

Tomorrow you fall

But

Anything's better than nothing at all

Florence: (singing) and the worst headlines are better

than no headlines at all.

Freddy: That's my girl !

Florence: (half jokingly, half serious) Don't get carried away

Scene 5

Choral "Verona" (ex Merano)

embedded is the Trumper press conference

journalists are deceptively friendly

Freddy: The Soviets use all dirty tricks they can get.

If there's a public their stooges stare at you

(overhead projection with headline "Beware the Stare ! Trumper paranoid")

If they could

they'd put itching powder

into my suit

(overhead projection: Trumper caricature, scratching his crotch "I've got an itch somewhere")

Reporter1: Don't you push your money demands over the top?

Freddy: Top performance deserves top reward.

Chess money is ludicrous compared to the fares of Football players

(overhead projection "If you want money, play Football" Double picture with a swashbuckling Freddy and a huge NFL player side by side)

Reporter2: The Russians don't care for money but have top players

Reporter3: They have an ideal, not just greed

Freddy: I prefer freedom and prosperity

Thank you very much !

(Freddy off)

Reporter chorus (Music: Song 'The Arbiter):

We do what we are told

we love them but, behold!

One day, we make them

Tomorrow, we break them

We tear them to pieces

and then

We put them together again

We are the Media

we are in control

we shape your world

and you follow us all

Scene 6

The tournament begins, announcement (off voice)

Enter Molokov and Walter and their cohorts from either side

Song "The arbiter", rewritten for a measly persona, Thomas Bach haircut, Lothar Schmidt binoculars, a rule book under his arm; sings with german accent dummy:

"once chess was an art,

now, it's a science

when will it be

an industry?

Song "Diplomats"

The merchandisers enter

Song: "The Merchandisers"

Presentations of the challenger and the champion

Molokov presents Anatoly to Florence

and here

SOMETHING HAS TO HAPPEN

to show Florence's disarray

Instrumental "Chess Game # 1"

Freddy appears and the normal movement picks up again.

Molokov proposes a meeting to Florence to discuss organisational matters and resolve some trouble points. They agree for the evening.

Walter draws Freddy into a conversation and away

Scene 7

Freddy and Florence, in their suite.

Freddy wants to embrace Florence from behind.

Florence remains unmoved.

Florence: Freddy, we have to talk.

Freddy: You don't want me to touch you?

Freddy looks at her, pensively, then turns around slowly and leaves the room

Florence Song "Nobody's side" new lyrics at the start:

"What's going on inside me, how come I am so tense?

I feel, my actions must be fast"

Scene 8

Walter calls up Florence to meet him and introduces Henry Stimson, of the State Dept., to Florence.

Henry: I'm a bigshot in the States.

I'm a headhunter for Uncle Sam and you are the game I'm preying

Florence: You know how to talk to women

Henry (laughing): We learned that you have exceptional skills and I would love to welcome you aboard.

Florence: How did you learn anything like that?

Henry: There's no secret. Mr Trumper is quite frank about your contribution to his game in private. Of course, he can give no details to not give away a clue to the other side

Florence (surprised): Oh, really?

Henry: Indeed. We also wonder how come you speak Russian so well.

Florence: by learning it.

Henry: must have been quick

Florence: let's say it took me more than one night.

Henry: to make a long story short. I have here a no-strings contract from which you can bail out anytime and five projects you might be interested in.

Henry hands her the documents, Florence starts reading them. She makes big eyes.

Henry: Is the price tag not right?

Florence: there are too many zeros, I guess.

Henry laughs

Florence signs the contract, and gives the project proposals, annotated.

Florence: Project 3 5 1 2 4, highest preference first.

Henry stretches out his hand, Florence shakes it.

Scene 9

Castle meeting (Verona has no mountains)

Prelude to Castle meeting: "Italian Song"

Should be an authentic, traditional italian folk song, no original composition

Use "Heaven help my heart" as a duet Florence- Anatoly

In one upper corner of the scene, Walter observes them through a tourist telescope. He runs out of time and John has to feed coins.

Freddy arrives and now knows why Florence has cooled down to him. He remains dignified and leaves.

Scene 10

Trumper strolls the city/countryside and reflects on his life

Song "Pity the Child"

Scene 11

Back at the meeting place, Walter and Molokov arrive, belatedly.

They sing a duet, a metaphor with the game of chess representing the world, as they see it:

"The World is our checkerboard
and passions make the rules
We make them dance,
we make them jive
we make them feel so much alive"

"Knights and bullies, the iron claw
everybody's enemy
eager to enforce the law,
strong in their brutality"

"Bishops, monks, manipulators,
indoctrinated indoctrinators,
paint the world in black and white
always divide,
never unite"

"Factories are the New City's tower,
industry is the World's new power
and Worker's fiery mighty will,
will never let a wheel stand still,
always must move and turn the mill,
churns out whatever fits the bill"

"Infantry like pawns advances
to certain death there are great chances

few survive and rise in rank,
only to die then in a tank"

"The Queen, the womb that children breeds
pushing their men to mighty deeds
picks the winner, picks the strong
lets no loser come along"

"The king, once a mover, now a prop
must give the reason for every kick and drop
in games played by innumerable fools
where madness rules"

In the background a procession of live marionettes:

"I'm in control

I am free

I am the master of my destiny"

Scene 12

The championship starts. Anatoly and Freddy at the board. Playing match after match. Coming and going.

Music: game # 2

Overhead projection (silently): sensationalist reporting of the tournament; scores appear one by one. Lots of draws. Going up to 5:5. Freddy and Anatoly finish a game, another draw. Freddy leaves the board, Walter waits for him and sidesteps with him.

Next game, Anatoly arrives and sits down at the board, alone.

then an announcement:

At equal score, Freddy Trumper has resigned the tournament.

End of Act 1

Act 2 Engrenage (in french)

Scene 13

Florence and Walter

Florence: Anatoly wants to stay in the West. Is there a way without too much trouble ?

Walter: For personal reasons ?

Florence: You guessed it

Walter: There would be no problem if he were a Westerner who can move freely, but as a Russian, he is under the command of his state. He cannot even apply for a visa without their consent.

Florence: what can he do then?

Walter: demand asylum for political reasons.

Florence: he is not into politics

Walter: but politics is on him. That's the easiest way and everything will go smoothly.

Florence nods and leaves the scene.

Walter, alone, smiling, makes a gesture of satisfaction.

Scene 14

Press conference with Anatoly

Reporter: You have defected to the West. Will you engage yourself politically to free the Soviet

Union.

Anatoly: My reasons are entirely personal

Reporter: How can you justify a demand for asylum then?

Anatoly: freedom of movement is a fundamental right

Reporter: The Mexicans seem to think that, too.

Reporter: You have to pick a side. If you want the benefits, you can't be on nobody's side

Anatoly: "Anthem"

*Overhead projection: "Russia in the Claws of an Evil Empire, Chess Champion opines"
"Freedom of Movement is a Human Right. Soviets deny it, Chess Champion says" etc.*

Scene 15

Anatoly and Molokov and, later, Svetlana. Still in Italy, but guarded by the Americans

To either side of the scene, american Marines

Music: "The Deal (no deal)"

Molokov: You brought shame to your land.

Didn't you have all
you could ever want?

Who in the West cares for chess?

Anatoly: This is no political rant.

I hold nothing against you

But what can I do?

I'm powerless
against a vicious press

Molokov: You are smart.

You had to factor that in.

Anatoly: And you have to factor in

that not all slaves obey your rules

Why not let us travel
freely as air

Why keep us in prison
and make us despair?

Molokov: I have not come to take lessons but to give orders.

You will play not a single tournament anymore.

The next championship will be your last and your loss.

Credibly, of course.

And this will remain secret.

Otherwise, should I remind you that your family and Svetlana are still with us?

Molokov turns and walks away

Overhead projection: Anatoly's family and Svetlana. Projection reduces to the real Svetlana who comes into the scene

Song "Someone else's Story"

Scene 16

"The Soviet Machine" with Molokov and his KGB colleagues.

In a corner of the scene, light shines up and shows

Walter and John, always with headphones, dancing a jig to the russian tune.

Scene 17

Anatoly and embassy civil servants "Embassy lament"

Scene 18a

Florence and Anatoly in a flat/house in the US.

Anatoly spends his time between chess analysis, drinking and sleeping.

Anatoly, alone: Song "Who needs a dream"

Florence enters and observes him

Song "I know him so well" (duet with Svetlana(?))

Scene 19

Florence and Henry Stimson

Florence: Anatoly does not play any tournaments and I believe I know why.

Henry: I guess so, but what can I do about it?

Florence: Don't you have a job for him? He is at least as gifted as I am.

Henry: Is it so bad?

Florence: Imagine a Jazzman who can't play his music anymore.

Henry: OK, but still: You're American. We cannot employ a foreigner on sensible projects.

Florence: He is no spy.

Henry: I understand your feelings and we value your work a lot.

I'll see what I can do.

But in the meantime, not the slightest word of this conversation to anybody, least of all Mr Sergeievsky. We have our protocols and they must be scrupulously obeyed.

Florence: That's agreed.

Scene 18b

Florence brings a pile of books on computer science and puts it in front of Anatoly

Song Duet with Florence "You and I"

Scene 20

The Championship is in preparation in Bangkok.

Trumper is the correspondent for Global TV, always accompanied by Walter.

Freddy's song "One Night in Bangkok"

Scene 21

Interview of Freddy with Anatoly

Freddy: Welcome back to the chess scene, Champion!

Anatoly: Thank you.

Freddy: The Chess World hasn't seen you since our last match.

There are so many Grandmasters all over the world who want to test the mettle of the New Champ. Why did you let them all down?

Anatoly (looks away): I have my reasons.

Freddy: Sure. Sad, you don't share them so we could understand.

How do you make a living in the West without playing Chess or sponsoring.

Anatoly: I have little needs and the last endorsement was quite generous

Freddy: Thank you very much.

I was scolded for greediness back then. Happy it helps somebody now.

But, seriously. The event now is an all-russian affair and the purse will be in roubles.

You can't even buy a subway ticket with that.

How are you going to live in the West without playing tournaments?

Anatoly: I already told you that I have my reasons.

Freddy: Fine, and the Chess World would be happy to know them.

You owe that to the chess fans. You are the first ambassador of chess.

You have a responsibility.

Anatoly (looks away, because he is lying): The Championship will be tough. I need my time for preparation.

Freddy: You had two years for that, now. You think that will be enough?

Anatoly: I'll do my best.

Freddy: Last time you were so confident and you let it know. Are you as sure of yourself against the Challenger and his Phalanx of Chess champ assistants.

Anatoly: Once on the board you're all alone.

Freddy: I knew that situation and believe me, it's worse when you're all alone off the board, too. What message do you want to give to the Chess World, the entire World is looking at you right now?

Anatoly: Stay humble.

Anatoly gets up, his head down and leaves the stage.

Scene 22

Henry and Walter

Walter: You've got something for our Russian friend already?

Henry: The project is underway.

Walter: Don't wait too long before his brain is swamped with Vodka.

Henry: We have to let him simmer until his stocks are at zero.

And, by the way, we owed Freddy this little revenge.

Speaking of able people. That was a swell idea of yours to recommend Florence to us.

Walter: You're welcome.

Scene 23

The two delegations meet for the official opening of the Championship.

Song "The Arbiter" changed into "The Challenger" sung by

the Challenger who is none else but Aleksii Novikov, Anatoly's friend from the beginning.

Scene 24

Anatoly and Aleksii meet in private in a hotel suite.

Aleksii: Finally, we meet again.

Aleksii goes straight to Anatoly and embraces him. Anatoly breaks down in tears.

Aleksii: Cheer up and cut out the tears. You are free now!

There is no deal anymore.

I crushed it, they had no choice. All the former champions were on my side.

We'll have a real fight, not a phony one and I'll kick your ass and I'll do it right, haha.

And you can play all the Chess you want in the rest of your life. We'll meet often, Linares, Hastings, and even Cuba if the Yankees let you

A corner of the scene lights up. Walter and John, with headphones, become visible.

Walter rips off his headphones and throws them to the ground

Walter: Damn it!!

Aleksii: Look, who I brought along

Aleksii calls in Anatoly's family (brother, parents etc), then

Aleksii: Come in, Dear.

Svetlana enters. Aleksii takes her arm. Both are smiling.

Aleksii: We will get married.

Svetlana: And we will have a baby.

Florence enters.

Final Quartet: "You and I"